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ASSESSMENT

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ANDREW SCHOFER FOR REASONS 1.5 (B, D
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11. (C) SUMMARY: Following up on reftel A, poloff met with Jan Jaap Groenemeijer, Senior Policy Advisor on Cuban Affairs at the Dutch MFA. For the purposes of the Libertad review, Dutch political and economic relations are reviewed in paragraphs 2 and 3. Groenemeijer noted that he did not expect the EU to have unanimity on Cuba sanctions in June, though the Dutch would support ending the sanctions with unanimous support by the EU (para 4). END SUMMARY.

Political Relations with Cuba

12. (C) The GONL continues to actively promote human rights in Cuba through outreach to dissidents. The Dutch support the EU's two-track policy in Cuba, believing that it's important to meet with government while at the same time pushing human rights issues. In an April 16 address to the Dutch parliament, Dutch Foreign Minister Verhagen said the Netherlands is looking to initiate a dialogue with Cuba centered on human rights and democracy. "Developments in these areas, such as the release of political prisoners, which dictate the progress (of the dialogue)." Post is not aware of any recent high-level diplomatic visits between Cuba and the Netherlands in the past six months, or any official exchange programs between the Netherlands and Cuba.

Economic Relations with Cuba

13. (C) The nature of Dutch investments in Cuba have not changed since post's most recent report (reftel B). On trade, the Netherlands Council for Trade Promotion (NCH) organized a trade mission to Cuba in March 2008. Over 20 Dutch companies participated in the mission, which focused on maritime and port facilities, food processing (especially dairy products), fertilizers, water treatment, pharmaceuticals, bio-energy/bio-fuels, solar and wind energy, tourism industry, gas and oil exploration, and public transport. The names of the companies were not released due to concerns about possible U.S. reprisal. However, local media reported that Rabobank (a large unlisted cooperative bank) and three Rotterdam-based shipping companies -- EWL, Blue Carrier, and Nirint -- participated in the mission. (Note: Nirint is part of Dutch conglomerate Fondel Group, a long-time importer of nickel from Cuba. End note.) Dutch MFA's Groenemeijer indicate the NCH might organize a second mission before the end of the year. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), total trade between the Netherlands and Cuba decreased in 2007. Dutch imports from Cuba were EUR 315 million (USD 495 million) in 2007, compared to EUR 472

million (USD 740 million) in 2006. Dutch exports to Cuba rose slightly to EUR 72 million (USD 112 million) from EUR 71 million (USD 111 million) in 2006. The Netherlands and Cuba do not have a bilateral trade agreement.

EU Cuba Policy

¶4. (C) Groenemeijer did not expect the EU to have unanimity on ending Cuba sanctions in June. In his view, "more has been happening in Cuba," but only because "Fidel did zero." Furthermore, "repression is growing at the moment," perhaps as a signal that "Raul is in charge." Nonetheless, in Groenemeijer's view, the EU should maneuver into a position of more influence, with more dialogue. However, the EU is not united on ending the suspended sanctions. The Dutch will push for consensus. They are "not on the Spanish line," but according to Groenemeijer, the Dutch will "look for good arguments to abolish the measures, in cooperation with the UK and Sweden." Given the lack of unanimity, Groenemeijer did not expect the EU to end the suspended sanctions in June ¶2008.

¶5. (C) Comment: Groenemeijer appears slightly more open to ending EU sanctions than his boss. In an April 7 letter to parliament, FM Verhagen thought it was "premature to decide on abolishing the 2003 measures.... I want to make that decision in consultation with other member states.... Important criteria are the developments in the area of human rights and ... the prospect of a meaningful...dialogue.... The overall human rights situation remains alarming." Post will follow up at senior levels to monitor the Dutch position

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and internal deliberations. End comment.
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